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ABSTRACT

By comparing Alfred Korzybski's and Richard Paul's approach to critical thinking, this paper presents a procedural example of how an individual can learn and develop expertise in human communicating. The paper offers various exercises beginning with select Korzybski general semantics communication theories and moving into critical thinking experiences. The approach outlined in the paper is suggested for students and faculty in classrooms as well as for persons who simply want to learn more about using general semantics and critical thinking as tools for observing, evaluating, and arriving at informed and fair judgments. The paper uses a PBS documentary, "In the White Man's Image" (about Native Americans) to point out how general semantics can be used in observing and analyzing, leading to more indepth critical thinking. To work out confusing and otherwise limiting symbolizing while communicating, the paper advocates using Paul's natural language approach aided by general semantics. The paper argues that selected general semantics devices can be used to counter what Paul sees as a weakness in Korzybski's overall theories. Nineteen references are attached. (NKA)

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TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING BY WAY OF GENERAL SEMANTICS

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Introduction:

In his 1987 Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture, Richard Paul recognized the contributions of general semantics to human communicating, and stated that his critical thinking approach updated Korzybski's theories. (Paul, pp. 436-445) This paper presents a procedural example of how one can learn and develop expertise in what Paul was talking about.

Alfred Korzybski's general semantics (1958, 1968) begins didactically (in the sense of definitions of terminology) but, can subsequently move to the dialogical (conversation) and the dialectical (logical argumentation). Korzybski was interested in people getting along with one another and accruing knowledge in a factual and non-biased manner for the good of all humans on earth.

Richard Paul's approach to critical thinking has the same altruistic purposes and presents a method which eschews the didactic for the Socratic method in pursuing knowledge.

This paper offers suggested exercises beginning with select Korzybski general semantics communication theories and moving into critical thinking experiences. The approach found in this paper is for students and faculty in classrooms as well as persons who want to informally learn more about using general semantics and critical thinking as tools for observing, evaluating and arriving at informed and fair judgments.

Neil Postman (1988) not withstanding, use television! This paper uses a PBS documentary about Native Americans to point out how general semantics can be a tool for observation and analysis leading to more indepth critical thinking. Such video programs can also be a method for considering multiculturalism.

General Semantics Devices:

Korzybski maintained that "good" communicating can take place when certain extensional (going beyond one's limited way of thinking) devices are used. A position taken in this essay is that these devices are: (1) may be used for observation of oral and written statements; and, (2) can lead to what Paul refers to as "higher order thinking" and, "fairminded critical thinking" (pp. 18-43). The general semantics extensional devices include:

1. nonallness:...The communicator will think, speak and

write in the following manner: 'I do not know all that there is to know about this person, place or thing.'

2. multimeanings:...Many words have more than one meaning. The communicator will attempt to be sensitive to such words and communicate accordingly.

3. multivaluedness:...There is more than one-value valid value system in the world.

4. indexing (differences):...Differences among people are potentially problematic. Do not let differences impede impede communication.

5. dating (change):...Life, as humans perceive it, is in a state of constant flux. Change in people, places and things can be all right.

6. symbol reacting:...(versus negative signal reacting) Symbols represent something else which humans are perceiving and thinking. Behavior should be based on what is behind symbols used in communicating.

7. the et cetera attitude:...Keep the mind open for further information. There is always more to be learned about a given person, place or thing.

Verbal and nonverbal behavior based on the above extensional devices "highlight the uniqueness of every person and event, to remind us of multiple causal influences, of differences in historical and environmental conditions, and of the impossibility of any statement covering all characteristics of a situation." (Paul, p.441) These are appropriate attitudes in preparing one for higher-levels of fairminded critical thinking.

Critical Thinking:

This essay uses select criteria from Richard Paul's approach to critical thinking: (1) the perfections of thought; (2) the elements of thought; and, (3) the domains of thought. (pp. 33-37)

The Perfections of Thought. These include clarity, precision, specificity, accuracy, logicalness and fairness while communicating. It is maintained that the above listed general semantics extensional devices can be included in developing and using perfec-

tions of thought.

The Elements of Thought. According to Paul, for appropriate critical thinking, one must understand, formulate, analyze and assess at least the following when considering a person, place or thing:

1. the frame of reference or points of view involved
2. assumptions made
3. central concepts and ideas involved
4. evidence, data, or reasons advanced
5. interpretations and claims made
6. inferences, reasoning, and lines of formulated thought

General Semantics extensional devices aid in developing the above elements of thought--as well as others listed by Paul. (p34)

The Domains Of Thought. The critical thinker must develop thinking by asking various questions appropriate to different perspectives; e. g., history, sociology, speech communication, et cetera. General semantics extensional devices lend themselves to beginning an individual's sensitivity to different professional and private perspectives from which to consider a given person, place or thing. A multiplicity of corroboration can be helpful in making decisions. Considering different fields of expertise is what Paul refers to as the "multilogical" in his approach to critical thinking. Multilogicalness can create conflicts which "good" thinkers will attempt to resolve by using the three basic areas of critical thinking listed above. The multilogical approach is one way in which Paul maintains that he is updating Korzybski.

Another Paul update to Korzybski is using "natural language" to do critical thinking. Korzybski's theories seem more complicated to work with because of his insistence on the efficacy of techno-scientific terminology and logic in order to be a better communicator. Thus, maintains Paul, Korzybski's approach to language discourages consideration of logics other than mathematics and specialized science. (pp. 440-442) Paul has perhaps succinctly articulated a reason why Korzybski's general semantics

never became as popularly received and used as Korzybski and his followers thought it should. Paul's "natural language" approach to critical thinking is communicating without specialized jargon and in one's native and conversational language. Natural language is not to be confused with "plain speaking" which, according to Hugh Kenner, is a deceptive political ploy. (pp. 261-269) Kenner presents Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" as an example of plain speaking which "is the most disorienting form of discourse yet invented by man." (p. 261) Garry Wills also makes this point in his study of the "Gettysburg Address":

> ...Plain speech is a later development, in whole cultures as in individuals. Simple prose depends on a complex epistemology....(p. 149)

This paper advocates Paul's natural language approach to critical thinking. But, Paul's natural language approach can be aided by using general semantics to work out of confusing and otherwise limiting symbolizing while communicating. The select general semantics devices featured in this essay can be used to counter, at least in part, what Paul sees as a weakness in Korzybski's overall theories!

Video:

"Knowledge is produced by thought, analyzed by thought, comprehended by thought, organized, evaluated, maintained, and transformed by thought." (Paul, p. 46) Using the documentary about Native Americans, "In The White Man's Image," (1992) can: (1) develop use and understanding of Korzybski's general semantics extensional devices; (2) provide an opportunity to explore moving from observing and evaluating by way of general semantics to the type of critical thinking which Paul advocates; (3) establish further insights into the history of the United States of America; (4)increase our factual knowledge; and, (5) introduce the subject of multiculturalism in an interesting fashion. However, any communication effort may be used as long as it is meaningful and/or interesting to the persons using them and accommodate questions, discussion and comparisons of logics. The following have also been helpful for purposes similar to that which the documentary serves in this essay: "Un Chien Andalou" (Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali); the mu-

sic video, "Don't Come Around Here No More," (Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers); "I Have A Dream," (Martin Luther King); and, "All The President's Men" (movie based on the Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward book). Also, A. E. van Vogt's science fantasy novels (1984, 1977, 1974) proselytizing general semantics have often stimulated interest and thoughtful discussion. (Drake, 1989)

General Semantics Evaluation:

"In The White Man's Image," was aired on public television in February, 1992. The opening words of host David McCullough clearly exemplify the ego-and-sociocentrism upon which the United States of America was built, and, which Paul's critical thinking eschews. McCullough informs his audience that in the late 1800's many white persons thought that the only way to handle Native Americans was to change them to the correct way of viewing the world and living. Eurocentric education was the answer. As N. Scott Momaday, a writer and contemporary Native American appearing on the show put it facetiously: "...draw a picture and let him [Native American] look at it and slowly, he will transform himself into the image that he sees there." (Transcript, p. 2)

As the documentary program progresses, it seems evident that there was a prevailing "allness" attitude (opposite of nonallness) on the part of white Americans, especially those who represented the "dominant ideology." (Griffin, p. 310f) According to the documentary, whites indicated that they seemed to know all that there was to know about Native Americans in setting up the educational experiments. (Further research would probably show that this allness approach realtive to Native Americans was based upon the socio-economic foundation of Manifest Destiny; i. e., what was really best for whites in their territorial expansionism.) No multivaluedness seems evident for it appears that Native American religious and social orientations were not being considered as valid. According to general semantics, no indexing is present because the white world seemed to have little room for the different life-style of Native Americans. And, signal reacting (negative reactions to symbols which represent something else and the opposite of reasoned symbol reacting) to Native American long hair on men and clothing

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which were the first to go in the educational experiment. According to Henrietta Mann, a historian and Native American featured in the documentary, "...to us, cutting one's hair is a sign of mourning, of death." (Transcript, p. 4) A critical thinker might investigate whether or not such psychological symbol manipulation was intensional on the part of whites, or, simply a manifestation of accidental insensitivity. General semanticists deal with what is behind symbols (words, clothing, et cetera) and react, if reacting is required. Note should be taken of the signal-symbol reacting of a Native American quoted in the documentary as stating: "...I want to live in a wood house. It will be easier to be good if I live in a wood house...."(Transcript, p. 6) Symbols and signals can be further investigated realtive to the use of the word, "cheated." According to a Brule Sioux of the time of the great educational experiment: "... The white man has always cheated us and we do not want our children to learn to do that." (Transcript, p. 7) At first glance, the educational experiment featured in the PBS documentary does reflect an et cetera attitude on the part of whites in wanting to learn more about educating select Native Americans. However, this is a jaundiced-type et cetera attitude because it is guided by the dominant ideology, Euro-centrism. A one-sided and ulterior motive approach to gaining further information is not what Korzybski had in mind for an et cetera attitude! Dating is reflected on the part of the conquerors, but, changes which they attempted to effect were again for monologic (one-value system) ego-and-sociocentric purposes. Altruism in the truest sense of the word seemed to be lacking on the part of the dominant ideology! Even a man allegedly more sensitive than many whites, Richard Henry Pratt, thought in terms of reforming the behavior of Native Americans during one of the educational experiments. (Transcript, p. 3) Had Pratt investigated reasons behind the behavior of those incarcerated Native Americans placed in his care?

A classic example of "poor" leading to genocidal communicating is the result of a general semantics evaluation of the educational experiment featured in the PBS documentary, "In The White Man's Image." The above analysis is not offered as definitive, but, rather, as an example of how general semantics extensional devices can be

used in observing and evaluating human communicating.

Critical Thinking:

After stimulating interest in Native Americans and charging the gray-matter, so to speak, one can logically move into Richard Paul's approach to critical thinking from where general semantics concerns have left off.

To say the least, the Native American educational experiment which "In The White Man's Image" features, exemplifies some results of monological thinking which Paul cites as a manifestation of uncritical thinking. Persons wanting to know more about the thinking of individuals and a nation relative to Native Americans may conduct research to obtain more factual information than could be presented within the restrictions imposed by broadcast conditions for "In The White Man's Image."

When it comes to some of the perfections of thought, what does the documentary show about both sides in using clarity, precision, accuracy and fairness? If there were violations of these good thinking criteria, why? Can the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis relative to culture shaping language (Hoijer, 1991) be applied to this time and particular situation in United States of America history? Certainly, at least two cultures were involved, the dominant white and the Native American"co-culture". Relative to accuracy and precision of thought and language, were the Native Americans of this time using a popular form of language known today as, "argot?" Argot is a coded-type of language to aid members of a co-culture to establish and maintain solidarity, release hostility and otherwise feel that they are defending themselves from the dominant culture which controls, or, attempts to control them. (Somovar/Porter, pp. 158-163)

Some of the elements of thought as listed by Paul could lead to more detailed information about the frames of reference indicated in the Native Americans documentary. Other questions to pursue are the assumptions made by Native Americans and whites, their central ideas and concepts, their interpretations and claims and their inferences and logics. A critical thinker could go beyond what is presented in the documentary about the white "God" versus

the Native American "gods". Another avenue of investigation which seems lacking in the documentary is what part the liaisons between Africans and Native Americans played in the verbal and nonverbal behavior of whites. By the early 1800's "some eastern Indian tribes included so many Negroes that it was difficult to distinguish between red and black...." (Berry/Blassingame, p. 42) What evidence and factual data were being used in the late 1800's by both sides? "The distinguishing feature of the Afro-American and Amerindian experience was, of course, the extent to which these peoples were made subject to the will and intent of the European colonizers...." (Mintz, p31) The first Native American newspaper began in 1828. (Wilson/ Gutierres, pp. 182-187) Were there Native American newspapers in existence at the time of the educational experiment described in, "In The WhiteMan's Image"? If so, what were they printing?

Taking into account various domains of thought, what contemporary views, data, et cetera, obtain which contribute to the subject of the relationships between Native Americans and whites yesterday and today? Are their any differences in the American, world view now than in the late 1800's? Further, what are the thoughts of contemporary political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, communicologists, Native Americans and others on the subject matter brought out in, "In The White Man's Image?" What is the subject matter of the documentary? Do conditions shown in the documentary currently take place? Can the same conditions happen in the future? Who says? What is their evidence?

Such questions as the above lead to further questions and more data which subsequently increases knowledge.

Conclusion

In his 1987 Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture, Paul recognized the contributions of general semantics to human communicating, and stated that his critical thinking approach updated Korzybski's theories. (Paul, pp. 436-445) This paper presents a procedural example of how one can learn and develop expertise in what Paul was talking about.

The television documentary, "In The White Man's Image," was

first evaluated by using some general semantics extensional devices for communicating which, it is maintained, can prompt one toward more detailed critical thinking using select formulations as described by Richard Paul. Results of the general semantics evaluation of the information provided in the documentary shows nearly a total lack of fair-minded behavior on the part of whites relative to Native Americans. General semantics evaluation results prompted further questions about whites and their dominant ideology, along with realizing that additional information is also needed about Native Americans of the time. Questions asked(which the documentary did not answer) lead to higher-level critical thinking which increases understanding and knowledge about the United States of America and Native Americans past and present. General semantics devices can be used to evaluate written and oral statements; moving into critical thinking can shed more light on why the statements were made.

Evaluating and analyzing the medium by which a message is transmitted and received was not a purpose of this paper. However, critical thinkers are interested in all media by which people transmit and receive information. (Paul, p. 67) Does, "In The White Man's Image," present a fair representation of all those involved? Was something important left out of the documentary? Could the documentary be rewritten and produced to make it more fairminded? Applying general semantics and critical thinking may not always deal with such interesting and dramatic subject matter as that used in this paper.

Observing, analyzing and thinking takes time! Today's classroom teacher, and conscientious persons in all other life situations, must consider how much time is available for general semantics and critical thinking procedures. Does the person scratching for survival on a daily basis have the time for general semantics and critical thinking procedures indicated in this essay? How many people have the intelligence to learn these techniques? Who is motivated to make the effort to think this way? If teachers don't know and use these theories, how will they teach them? How are we going to teach the teachers?

With his general semantics techniques, Alfred Korzybski

wanted to help humanity grow up (1958), but, not enough people in his lifetime had the resources or were motivated to move from puberty to adulthood. Richard Paul is a contemporary Korzybski educator and Bucky Fuller-type (Drake, 1972;) renaissance man. Paul is also experiencing similar barriers to his theories, but, perhaps Paul can advance farther than Korzybski was able to do.

General semantics analyses coupled with critical thinking procedures seem, as of this writing, far too intelletually demanding for the majority of citizens in a country which historically has been anti-intellectual. It would also seem that at this time, general semantics and critical thinking are too fair-minded and too revealable to be comfortable for most people. Perhaps genetic engineering is an answer for moving people toward the theories presented in this paper. For perhaps only then, can the human world of of tomorrow on this earth and/or other planets, will more readily accept and use such communication theories as begun by Alfred Korzybski and Richard Paul.

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